

In the Felicia Ward.



THE Felicia ward, long and broad and pleasantly warm, is rather flushed and excited this evening, and infant boys can no more keep their small heads, as usual, on the pillows of their iron cots and stare at the ceiling than they can fly away home to see their mothers. The ward feels that on the whole it is uncommonly lucky in having a bad arm, a bandaged knee, a chest complaint, or some other irregularity, and it rather pities poor infants outside who are quite well, and consequently have no right of entry through the swing-doors at the end of Felicia. It was through these swing-doors that came, an hour since, to the ward's great interest, a—you will never guess—a pianoforte, a real pianoforte. It came rather reluctantly, it is true, and it had to be coaxed by the nurses and encouraged by the doctors. It seemed to fear that it was being brought to Felicia in order to be dosed with medicine and examined by a group of young men. But it had to come in, and there it is now at the further end, near the long fire, with its lid open, and so near to No. 22 that, but for the fact that that bullet-headed boy had his leg strapped, for its better amendment, to the cot, he could lean out and touch the bass keys. Chairs have been placed near the piano; its pink-shaded candles have been lighted; a banjo-case was brought in with reverential care a minute ago by a smooth-haired young man, and when he took it out and pink-a-pinked on it to see if the strings were in order every little gray counterpaneled cot on the medical side of Felicia rocked with excitement.

"He'll 'ave to black his blooming face if he's going to ply on it," whispers Eighteen confidently.

"Tain't necessary," replies Nineteen.

"Ho! shows what you know about it."

"Yus, it shows what I know about it," says Nineteen.

"May I ask you a simple question? Did you ever see a man ply the banjo without his face being blacked?"

"Come to think on it," answers Nineteen thoughtfully, "I never ain't. P'raps you're right for once."

One of the tall, good-looking nurses says: "Now, you boys, don't get excited; keep yourselves cool," and herself instantly dances a few steps on the floor out of sheer joy of anticipation. Small dots of children with thin weazened faces are brought in now from the other wards, and Felicia looks at them resentfully, as who should say, "Pray, who sent you an invitation?" In less time than you think a good dozen or more small boys who are getting better are out of bed, and, in their scarlet night-gowns are carried to the chairs facing the

pianoforte, with a special high chair for Number Five, who is not quite two years old. Other cots are moved slightly, and Nine, who wants to scream because the movement pains him, represses the scream like a man, and hides his face on the pillow so that no one shall see.

"Now, all you children must be very quiet, mind; and if I hear the least nonsense or interruption, everything will be stopped directly. You understand?"

"Yus, nurse."

"Well, mind now and don't forget."

"Will it be long naow, nurse, before they begin?"

"Who is asking that?"

"Thirteen, nurse!" (Triumphant chorus from all the other infants.)

"Thirteen, you're a very naughty boy to ask questions and I've a good mind to—How do you do, Mr. Herbert? All your friends here? So good of you."

Felicia receives its visitors quietly and critically, although when the last one



"BEN' DOWN. WANT TO TELL YOU SOMETHING."

comes—an attractive young woman in yellow evening dress, who takes over from the smooth-haired youth charge of the banjo—Nineteen, being a ten-year-old in n of the world and not insensible to the charms of female beauty, goes so far as to say very quietly, "Ongore!" A stout breezy doctor commences to rattle off a medley of comic airs on the pianoforte, and instantly the expression on every small white face changes from reticence to frank enjoyment. When they begin (because they cannot help it) to hum the choruses, one of the nurses shakes her head, and the breezy doctor finishes by three or four whacking chords that make the pianoforte stagger and reel again.

"Why don't they 'ave a program? At the Eastern Palace, near Bow Stition, my bruvver says they always 'ave programs; 'Ow's hany one to kn w their blooming nimes or what the blooming—"

"Close the lid, teen. Can't you see banjo t ttle's a beginning?"

"'Eaven send," says Eighteen hope-

fully, "that she knows how to play it. It takes a bit of doing, mind ye."

Fortunately the Banjo Girl in her playing reaches the high standard demanded by Eighteen; and there is at the finish so much clapping of small hands (led with emphasis by the smooth-haired young man) that she had to do something more, and gives this time a plaintive song with a strongly marked air that makes all those who can mark the time with their bare feet tap the polished floor softly.

"Mandy, I'm goin' fer to leave you."

"Mandy, I'm goin' far away."

Your Pete he'll often sigh for you, an' sometimes sure he'll cry for you.

"Mandy! 'Mandy! I'm leavin' ye to-day."

The Banjo Girl sings this with tenderness; and the breezy doctor, seeing from the mournful expression on the small faces before him (Baby Two alone is amused; that an antidote is required, signals to the smooth-haired young man, who stands up and, in an astonishingly deep voice, declares in a rattling song, to the doctor's accompaniment, that he's a captain bold, though he's getting old, and he sails the stormy sea; he knows no fear, from the Old Swan Pier till he reaches the rocky lea. 'Tis a reckless life for a man with a wife when the waves dash ten miles high; but when dangers come he drinks his rum, and his gallant crew then cry—

"Now then, boys," requests the smooth-haired young man, "lend a hand with the chorus."

The thin piping voices are a little shy at first, until the chorus has been properly introduced, but once they know it they like it very much:

With a yo heave ho and yo heave he
And a yo heave you and yo heave me,
And a yo heave everybody on the sea,
And jolly good luck to the navy.

It is Eighteen who hits upon and organizes the ingenious device of repeating the chorus twice to each verse, and it is Eighteen who has presently to be spoken to because when the 'cello is granting a long selection he still hums Yo heave ho and yo heave he, affecting to be under the impression that the seafaring song is still the current item. Even later the chorus backs out in a small way in different parts of Felicia, and the breezy doctor, noting this, and being a tactful man, orders it—after some one has done weird feats with bird-cages and rolls of ribbons and packs of cards and live rabbits, the mystery of which astonishes the ward and especially Baby Two, but is no mystery to Eighteen, who says the dodge is to keep everything up your sleeve—orders it, to the ward's intense delight, to be sung again by the smooth-haired young man.

The visitors prepare to go; the infants on chairs are lifted up by the nurses and put very carefully into their beds—very carefully, because the mites who come here are so harshly handicapped in the race of life that 20 per cent. of them close their eyes in Felicia and give up the attempt. Poor little Nme, with his bandaged head on his